

S P E E C H
OF
THE HON. HENRY CLAY,
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,
ON THE SUBJECT OF
ABOLITION PETITIONS,

FEBRUARY 7, 1839.

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S P E E C H .

I HAVE received, Mr. President, a petition to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, which I wish to present to the Senate. It is signed by several hundred inhabitants of the District of Columbia, and chiefly of the city of Washington. Among them I recognise the name of the highly esteemed mayor of the city, and other respectable names, some of which are personally and well known to me. They express their regret, that the subject of the abolition of slavery within the District of Columbia continues to be pressed upon the consideration of Congress, by inconsiderate and misguided individuals in other parts of the United States. They state that they do not desire the abolition of slavery within the District, even if Congress possess the very questionable power of abolishing it, without the consent of the people whose interests would be immediately and directly affected by the measure; that it is a question solely between the people of the District and their only constitutional legislature, purely municipal, and one in which no exterior influence or interest can

justly interfere ; that, if at any future period the people of this District should desire the abolition of slavery within it, they will doubtless make their wishes known, when it will be time enough to take the matter into consideration ; that they do not, on this occasion, present themselves to Congress because they are slaveholders, — many of them are not, some of them are conscientiously opposed to slavery, — but they appear because they justly respect the rights of those who own that description of property, and because they entertain a deep conviction, that the continued agitation of the question, by those who have no right to interfere with it, has an injurious influence on the peace and tranquillity of the community, and upon the well-being and happiness of those who are held in subjection. They finally protest as well against the unauthorized intervention of which they complain, as against any legislation on the part of Congress in compliance therewith. But, as I wish these respectable petitioners to be themselves heard, I request that their petition may be read.

I am informed by the committee which requested me to offer this petition, and believe, that it expresses the almost unanimous sentiments of the people of the District of Columbia.

The performance of this service affords me a legitimate opportunity, of which, with the permission of the Senate, I mean now to avail myself, to say something, not only on the particular objects of the peti-

tion, but upon the great and interesting subject with which it is intimately associated.

It is well known to the Senate, that I have thought that the most judicious course with abolition petitions has not been of late pursued by Congress. I have believed that it would have been wisest to have received and referred them, without opposition, and to have reported against their object in a calm and dispassionate and argumentative appeal to the good sense of the whole community. It has been supposed, however, by a majority of Congress, that it was most expedient, either not to receive the petitions at all, or, if formally received, not to act definitively upon them. There is no substantial difference between these opposite opinions, since both look to an absolute rejection of the prayer of the petitioners. But there is a great difference in the form of proceeding; and, Mr. President, some experience in the conduct of human affairs has taught me to believe that a neglect to observe established forms is often attended with more mischievous consequences than the infliction of a positive injury. We all know, that, even in private life, a violation of the existing usages and ceremonies of society cannot take place without serious prejudice. I fear, Sir, that the abolitionists have acquired a considerable apparent force by blending with the object, which they have in view, a collateral and totally different question, arising out of an alleged violation of the right of petition. I know full well, and take great pleasure in testifying, that nothing was remoter from

the intention of the majority of the Senate, from which I differed, than to violate the right of petition in any case in which, according to its judgment, that right could be constitutionally exercised, or where the object of the petition could be safely or properly granted. Still, it must be owned that the abolitionists have seized hold of the fact of the treatment which their petitions have received in Congress, and made injurious impressions upon the minds of a large portion of the community. This, I think, might have been avoided by the course which I should have been glad to have seen pursued.

And I desire now, Mr. President, to advert to some of those topics, which, I think, might have been usefully embodied in a report by a committee of the Senate, and which, I am persuaded, would have checked the progress, if it had not altogether arrested the efforts of abolition. I am sensible, Sir, that this work would have been accomplished, with much greater ability and with much happier effect, under the auspices of a committee, than it can be by me. But, anxious as I always am to contribute whatever is in my power to the harmony, concord, and happiness of this great people, I feel myself irresistibly impelled to do whatever is in my power, incompetent as I feel myself to be, to dissuade the public from continuing to agitate a subject fraught with the most direful consequences.

There are three classes of persons opposed, or apparently opposed, to the continued existence of slave-

ry in the United States. The first are those who, from sentiments of philanthropy and humanity, are conscientiously opposed to the existence of slavery, but who are no less opposed, at the same time, to any disturbance of the peace and tranquillity of the Union, or the infringement of the powers of the States composing the Confederacy. In this class may be comprehended that peaceful and exemplary society of "Friends," one of whose established maxims is an abhorrence of war in all its forms, and the cultivation of peace and good-will amongst mankind. The next class consists of apparent abolitionists, — that is, those who, having been persuaded that the right of petition has been violated by Congress, coöperate with the abolitionists for the sole purpose of asserting and vindicating that right. And the third class are the real ultra abolitionists, who are resolved to persevere in the pursuit of their object at all hazards, and without regard to any consequences, however calamitous they may be. With them the rights of property are nothing ; the deficiency of the powers of the general Government is nothing ; the acknowledged and incontestible powers of the States are nothing ; civil war, a dissolution of the Union, and the overthrow of a government in which are concentrated the fondest hopes of the civilized world, are nothing. A single idea has taken possession of their minds, and onward they pursue it, overlooking all barriers, reckless and regardless of all consequences. With this class, the immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Co-

lumbia, and in the Territory of Florida, the prohibition of the removal of slaves from State to State, and the refusal to admit any new State, comprising within its limits the institution of domestic slavery, are but so many means conducing to the accomplishment of the ultimate but perilous end at which they avowedly and boldly aim,— are but so many short stages in the long and bloody road to the distant goal at which they would finally arrive. Their purpose is abolition, universal abolition, peaceably if it can be, forcibly if it must. Their object is no longer concealed by the thinnest veil; it is avowed and proclaimed. Utterly destitute of constitutional or other rightful power, living in totally distinct communities, as alien to the communities in which the subject on which they would operate resides, so far as concerns political power over that subject, as if they lived in Africa or Asia, they nevertheless promulgate to the world their purpose to be to manumit forthwith, and without compensation, and without moral preparation, three millions of negro slaves, under jurisdictions altogether separated from those under which they live.

I have said that immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and in the Territory of Florida, and the exclusion of new States, were only means towards the attainment of a much more important end. Unfortunately, they are not the only means. Another, and much more lamentable one, is that, which this class is endeavoring to employ, of arraying one portion against another portion of the Union.

With that view, in all their leading prints and publications, the alleged horrors of slavery are depicted in the most glowing and exaggerated colors, to excite the imaginations and stimulate the rage of the people in the free States against the people in the slave States. The slaveholder is held up and represented as the most atrocious of human beings. Advertisements of fugitive slaves, and of slaves to be sold, are carefully collected and blazoned forth, to infuse a spirit of detestation and hatred against one entire and the largest section of the Union. And, like a notorious agitator upon another theatre, they would hunt down and proscribe from the pale of civilized society the inhabitants of that entire section. Allow me, Mr. President, to say, that, whilst I recognise in the justly wounded feelings of the Minister of the United States at the Court of St. James much to excuse the notice which he was provoked to take of that agitator, in my humble opinion he would better have consulted the dignity of his station and of his country in treating him with contemptuous silence. He would exclude us from European society — he who himself can only obtain a contraband admission, and is received with scornful repugnance into it! If he be no more desirous of our society than we are of his, he may rest assured that a state of eternal non-intercourse will exist between us. Yes, Sir, I think the American Minister would have best pursued the dictates of true dignity, by regarding the language of the member of the British House of Commons as the malignant rav-

ings of the plunderer of his own country, and the libeller of a foreign and kindred people.

But the means to which I have already adverted are not the only ones which this third class of ultra abolitionists are employing to effect their ultimate end. They began their operations by professing to employ only persuasive means, in appealing to the humanity, and enlightening the understandings, of the slaveholding portion of the Union. If there were some kindness in this avowed motive, it must be acknowledged that there was rather a presumptuous display also of an assumed superiority in intelligence and knowledge. For some time they continued to make these appeals to our duty and our interest; but, impatient with the slow influence of their logic upon our stupid minds, they recently resolved to change their system of action. To the agency of their powers of persuasion, they now propose to substitute the powers of the ballot box; and he must be blind to what is passing before us, who does not perceive that the inevitable tendency of their proceedings is, if these should be found insufficient, to invoke, finally, the more potent powers of the bayonet. Mr. President, it is at this alarming stage of the proceedings of the ultra abolitionists, that I would seriously invite every considerate man in the country solemnly to pause, and deliberately to reflect, not merely on our existing posture, but upon that dreadful precipice down which they would hurry us. It is because these ultra abolitionists have ceased to employ the instruments of reason and

persuasion, have made their cause political, and have appealed to the ballot box, that I am induced, upon this occasion, to address you.

There have been three epochs in the history of our country, at which the spirit of abolition displayed itself. The first was immediately after the formation of the present Federal Government. When the Constitution was about going into operation, its powers were not well understood by the community at large, and remained to be accurately interpreted and defined. At that period numerous abolition societies were formed, comprising not merely the Society of Friends, but many other good men. Petitions were presented to Congress, praying for the abolition of slavery. They were received without serious opposition, referred, and reported upon by a committee. The report stated that the general Government had no power to abolish slavery as it existed in the several States, and that these States themselves had exclusive jurisdiction over the subject. The report was generally acquiesced in, and satisfaction and tranquillity ensued ; the abolition societies thereafter limiting their exertions, in respect to the black population, to offices of humanity within the scope of existing laws.

The next period, when the subject of slavery and abolition incidentally was brought into notice and discussion, was that on the memorable occasion of the admission of the State of Missouri into the Union. The struggle was long, strenuous, and fearful. It is too recent to make it necessary to do more than

merely advert to it, and to say, that it was finally composed by one of those compromises characteristic of our institutions, and of which the Constitution itself is the most signal instance.

The third is that in which we now find ourselves. Various causes, Mr. President, have contributed to produce the existing excitement on the subject of abolition. The principal one, perhaps, is the example of British emancipation of the slaves in the islands adjacent to our country. Such is the similarity in laws, in language, in institutions, and in common origin, between Great Britain and the United States, that no great measure of national policy can be adopted in the one country, without producing a considerable degree of influence in the other. Confounding the totally different cases together, of the powers of the British Parliament and those of the Congress of the United States, and the totally different situations of the British West India Islands, and the slaves in the sovereign and independent States of this Confederacy, superficial men have inferred from the undecided British experiment the practicability of the abolition of slavery in these States. The powers of the British Parliament are unlimited, and are often described to be omnipotent. The powers of the American Congress, on the contrary, are few, cautiously limited, scrupulously excluding all that are not granted, and, above all, carefully and absolutely excluding all power over the existence or continuance of slavery in the several States. The slaves, too, upon which Brit-

ish legislation operated, were not in the bosom of the kingdom, but in remote and feeble colonies having no voice in Parliament. The West India slaveholder was neither represented nor representative in that Parliament. And whilst I most fervently wish complete success to the British experiment of West India emancipation, I confess that I have fearful forebodings of a disastrous termination of it. Whatever it may be, I think it must be admitted, that, if the British Parliament treated the West India slaves as freemen, it also treated the West India freemen as slaves. If, instead of these slaves being separated by a wide ocean from the parent country, three or four millions of African negro slaves had been dispersed over England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and their owners had been members of the British Parliament,—a case which would have presented some analogy to that of our own country,—does any one believe that it would have been expedient or practicable to have emancipated them, leaving them to remain, with all their embittered feelings, in the United Kingdom, boundless as the powers of the British Parliament are?

Other causes have conspired with the British example to produce the existing excitement from abolition. I say it with profound regret, but with no intention to occasion irritation here or elsewhere, that there are persons in both parts of the Union who have sought to mingle abolition with politics, and to array one portion of the Union against the other. It is the misfortune in free countries, that, in high party times, a dis-

position too often prevails to seize hold of everything which can strengthen the one side or weaken the other. Charges of fostering abolition designs have been heedlessly and unjustly made by one party against the other. Prior to the late election of the present President of the United States, he was charged with being an abolitionist, and abolition designs were imputed to many of his supporters. Much as I was opposed to his election and am to his administration, I neither shared in making nor believing the truth of the charge. He was scarcely installed in office before the same charge was directed against those who opposed his election.

Mr. President, it is not true, and I rejoice that it is not true, that either of the two great parties in this country has any designs or aim at abolition. I should deeply lament if it were true. I should consider, if it were true, that the danger to the stability of our system would be infinitely greater than any which does, I hope, actually exist. Whilst neither party can be, I think, justly accused of any abolition tendency or purpose, both have profited, and both have been injured, in particular localities, by the accession or abstraction of abolition support. If the account were fairly stated, I believe the party to which I am opposed has profited much more, and been injured much less, than that to which I belong. But I am far, for that reason, from being disposed to accuse our adversaries of being abolitionists.

And, now, Mr. President, allow me to consider the

several cases in which the authority of Congress is invoked by these abolition petitioners upon the subject of domestic slavery. The first relates to it as it exists in the District of Columbia. The following is the provision of the Constitution of the United States in reference to that matter: —

“ To exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever over such District (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of Government of the United States.”

This provision preceded, in point of time, the actual cessions which were made by the States of Maryland and Virginia. The object of the cession was to establish a *seat of Government of the United States*; and the grant in the Constitution of exclusive legislation must be understood, and should be always interpreted, as having relation to the object of the cession. It was with a full knowledge of this clause in the Constitution that those two States ceded to the general Government the ten miles square constituting the District of Columbia. In making the cession, they supposed that it was to be applied, and applied solely, to the purposes of a seat of Government, for which it was asked. When it was made, slavery existed in both those Commonwealths, and in the ceded territory, as it now continues to exist in all of them. Neither Maryland nor Virginia could have anticipated, that, whilst the institution remained within

their respective limits, its abolition would be attempted by Congress without their consent. Neither of them would probably have made an unconditional cession, if they could have anticipated such a result.

From the nature of the provision in the Constitution, and the avowed object of the acquisition of the territory, two duties arise on the part of Congress. The first is, to render the District available, comfortable, and convenient, as a seat of Government of the whole Union; the other is, to govern the people within the District so as best to promote their happiness and prosperity. These objects are totally distinct in their nature, and, in interpreting and exercising the grant of the power of exclusive legislation, that distinction should be constantly borne in mind. Is it necessary, in order to render this place a comfortable seat of the general Government, to abolish slavery within its limits? No one can or will advance such a proposition. The Government has remained here near forty years without the slightest inconvenience from the presence of domestic slavery. Is it necessary to the well-being of the people of the District that slavery should be abolished from amongst them? They not only neither ask nor desire, but are almost unanimously opposed to it. It exists here in the mildest and most mitigated form. In a population of thirty-nine thousand eight hundred and thirty-four, there were, at the last enumeration of the population of the United States, but six thousand one hun-

dred and nineteen slaves. The number has not probably much increased since. They are dispersed over the ten miles square, engaged in the quiet pursuits of husbandry, or in menial offices in domestic life. If it were necessary to the efficiency of this place, as a seat of the general Government, to abolish slavery, which is utterly denied, the abolition should be confined to the necessity which prompts it, that is, to the limits of the city of Washington itself. Beyond those limits, persons concerned in the Government of the United States have no more to do with the inhabitants of the District than they have with the inhabitants of the adjacent counties of Maryland and Virginia, which lie beyond the District.

To abolish slavery within the District of Columbia, whilst it remains in Virginia and Maryland, situated, as that District is, within the very heart of those States, would expose them to great practical inconvenience and annoyance. The District would become a place of refuge and escape for fugitive slaves from the two States, and a place from which a spirit of discontent, insubordination, and insurrection might be fostered and encouraged in the two States. Suppose, as was at one time under consideration, Pennsylvania had granted ten miles square within its limits for the purpose of a seat of the general Government; could Congress without a violation of good faith, have introduced and established slavery within the bosom of that Commonwealth, in the ceded territory, after she had abolished it so long ago as the year 1780? Yet

the inconvenience to Pennsylvania in the case supposed would have been much less than that to Virginia and Maryland in the case we are arguing.

It was upon this view of the subject that the Senate, at its last session, solemnly declared that it would be a violation of implied faith, resulting from the transaction of the cession, to abolish slavery within the District of Columbia. And would it not be? By implied faith is meant, that, when a grant is made for one avowed and declared purpose, known to the parties, the grant should not be perverted to another purpose, unavowed and undeclared, and injurious to the grantor. The grant, in the case we are considering, of the territory of Columbia, was for a *seat of Government*. Whatever power is necessary to accomplish that object is carried along by the grant. But the abolition of slavery is not necessary to the enjoyment of this site as a seat of the general Government. The grant in the Constitution, of exclusive power of legislation over the District, was made to insure the exercise of an exclusive authority of the general Government, to render this place a safe and secure seat of Government, and to promote the well-being of the inhabitants of the District. The power granted ought to be interpreted and exercised solely to the end for which it was granted. The language of the grant was necessarily broad, comprehensive, and exclusive, because all the exigencies, which might arise to render this a secure seat of the general Government, could not have been foreseen and provided

for. The language may possibly be sufficiently comprehensive to include a power of abolition, but it would not at all thence follow that the power could be rightfully exercised. The case may be resembled to that of a plenipotentiary invested with a plenary power, but who, at the same time, has positive instructions from his Government as to the kind of treaty which he is to negotiate and conclude. If he violates those instructions, and concludes a different treaty, his Government is not bound by it. And if the foreign Government is aware of the violation, it acts in bad faith. Or it may be illustrated by an example drawn from private life. I am an endorser for my friend on a note discounted in bank. He applies to me to endorse another to renew it, which I do in blank. Now, this gives him power to make any other use of my note which he pleases. But if, instead of applying it to the intended purpose, he goes to a broker and sells it, thereby doubling my responsibility for him, he commits a breach of trust, and a violation of the good faith implied in the whole transaction.

But, Mr. President, if this reasoning were as erroneous as I believe it to be correct and conclusive, is the affair of the liberation of six thousand negro slaves in this District, disconnected with the three millions of slaves in the United States, of sufficient magnitude to agitate, distract, and embitter this great Confederacy?

The next case, in which the petitioners ask the exer-

cise of the power of Congress, relates to slavery in the Territory of Florida.

Florida is the extreme southern portion of the United States. It is bounded on all its land sides by slave States, and is several hundred miles from the nearest free State. It extends almost within the tropics, and the nearest important island to it on the water side is Cuba, a slave island. This simple statement of its geographical position should of itself decide the question. When, by the treaty of 1819 with Spain, it was ceded to the United States, slavery existed within it. By the terms of that treaty, the effects and property of the inhabitants are secured to them, and they are allowed to remove and take them away, if they think proper to do so, without limitation as to time. If it were expedient, therefore, to abolish slavery in it, it could not be done consistently with the treaty, without granting to the ancient inhabitants a reasonable time to remove their slaves. But further. By the compromise which took place on the passage of the act for the admission of Missouri into the Union, in the year 1820, it was agreed and understood that the line of 36 degrees 30 minutes of north latitude should mark the boundary between the free States and the slave States, to be created in the territories of the United States, ceded by the treaty of Louisiana; those situated south of it being slave States, and those north of it free States. But Florida is south of that line, and, consequently, according to the spirit of the understanding which prevailed at the period

alluded to, should be a slave State. It may be true that the compromise does not in terms embrace Florida, and that it is not absolutely binding and obligatory; but all candid and impartial men must agree that it ought not to be disregarded without the most weighty considerations, and that nothing could be more to be deprecated than to open anew the bleeding wounds which were happily bound up and healed by that compromise. Florida is the only remaining Territory to be admitted into the Union with the institution of domestic slavery, while Wisconsin and Iowa are now nearly ripe for admission without it.

The next instance in which the exercise of the power of Congress is solicited is that of prohibiting what is denominated by the petitioners the slave-trade between the States, or, as it is described in abolition petitions, the traffic in human beings between the States. This exercise of the power of Congress is claimed under that clause of the Constitution, which invests it with authority to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the 'several States, and with the Indian tribes. The power to regulate commerce among the several States, like other powers in the Constitution, has hitherto remained dormant in respect to the interior trade by land between the States. It was a power granted, like all the other powers of the general Government, to secure peace and harmony among the States. Hitherto it has not been necessary to exercise it. All the cases, in which, during the progress of time, it may become expedient

to exert the general authority to regulate commerce between the States, cannot be conceived. We may easily imagine, however, contingencies, which, if they were to happen, might require the interposition of the common authority. If, for example, the State of Ohio were, by law, to prohibit any vessel entering the port of Cincinnati, from the port of Louisville, in Kentucky, if that case be not already provided for by the laws which regulate our coasting-trade, it would be competent to the general Government to annul the prohibition emanating from State authority. Or if the State of Kentucky were to prohibit the introduction, within its limits, of any articles of trade, the production of the industry of the inhabitants of the State of Ohio, the general Government might, by its authority, supersede the State enactment. But I deny that the general Government has any authority whatever, from the Constitution, to abolish what is called the slave trade, or, in other words, to prohibit the removal of slaves from one slave State to another slave State.

The grant in the Constitution is of a power of *regulation*, and not prohibition. It is conservative, not destructive. Regulation, *ex vi termini*, implies the continued existence or prosecution of the thing regulated. Prohibition implies total discontinuance or annihilation. The regulation intended was designed to facilitate and accommodate, not to obstruct and incommodate, the commerce to be regulated. Can it be pretended, that, under this power to regulate commerce

among the States, Congress has the power to prohibit the transportation of live stock, which, in countless numbers, are daily passing from the Western and interior States to the Southern, Southwestern, and Atlantic States? The moment the incontestable fact is admitted, that negro slaves are property, the law of movable property irresistibly attaches itself to them, and secures the right of carrying them from one to another State, where they are recognised as property, without any hindrance whatever from Congress.

But, Mr. President, I will not detain the Senate longer on the subjects of slavery within the District and in Florida, and of the right of Congress to prohibit the removal of slaves from one State to another. These, as I have already intimated, with ultra abolitionists are but so many masked batteries, concealing the real and ultimate point of attack. That point of attack is the institution of domestic slavery as it exists in these States. It is to liberate three millions of slaves held in bondage within them. And now allow me, Sir, to glance at the insurmountable obstacles which lie in the way of the accomplishment of this end, and at some of the consequences which would ensue if it were possible to attain it.

The first impediment is the utter and absolute want of all power on the part of the general Government to effect the purpose. The Constitution of the United States creates a limited Government, comprising comparatively few powers, and leaving the residuary mass

of political power in the possession of the several States. It is well known that the subject of slavery interposed one of the greatest difficulties in the formation of the Constitution. It was happily compromised and adjusted in a spirit of harmony and patriotism. According to that compromise, no power whatever was granted to the general Government in respect to domestic slavery, but that which relates to taxation and representation, and the power to restore fugitive slaves to their lawful owners. All other power in regard to the institution of slavery was retained exclusively by the States, to be exercised by them severally, according to their respective views of their own peculiar interest. The Constitution of the United States never could have been formed upon the principle of investing the general Government with authority to abolish the institution at its pleasure. It never can be continued for a single day if the exercise of such a power be assumed or usurped.

But it may be contended by these ultra abolitionists that their object is not to stimulate the action of the general Government, but to operate upon the States themselves in which the institution of domestic slavery exists. If that be their object, why are these abolition societies and movements all confined to the free States? Why are the slave States wantonly and cruelly assailed? Why do the abolition presses teem with publications tending to excite hatred and animosity on the part of the inhabitants of the free States against those of the slave States? Why is Congress

petitioned? The free States have no more power or right to interfere with institutions in the slave States, confided to the exclusive jurisdiction of those States, than they would have to interfere with institutions existing in any foreign country. What would be thought of the formation of societies in Great Britain, the issue of numerous inflammatory publications, and the sending out of lecturers throughout the kingdom, denouncing and aiming at the destruction of any of the institutions of France? Would they be regarded as proceedings warranted by good neighborhood? Or what would be thought of the formation of societies in the slave States, the issue of violent and inflammatory tracts, and the deputation of missionaries, pouring out impassioned denunciations against institutions under the exclusive control of the free States? Is their purpose to appeal to our understandings, and to actuate our humanity? And do they expect to accomplish that purpose by holding us up to the scorn, and contempt, and detestation of the people of the free States and the whole civilized world? The slavery which exists among us is our affair, not theirs; and they have no more just concern with it than they have with slavery as it exists throughout the world. Why not leave it to us, as the common Constitution of our country has left it, to be dealt with, under the guidance of Providence, as best we may or can?

The next obstacle in the way of abolition arises out of the fact of the presence in the slave States of three millions of slaves. They are there, dispersed

throughout the land, part and parcel of our population. They were brought into the country originally under the authority of the parent Government whilst we were colonies, and their importation was continued in spite of all the remonstrances of our ancestors. If the question were an original question, whether, there being no slaves within the country, we should introduce them, and incorporate them into our society, that would be a totally different question. Few, if any, of the citizens of the United States would be found to favor their introduction. No man in it would oppose, upon that supposition, their admission with more determined resolution and conscientious repugnance than I should. But that is not the question. The slaves are here; no practical scheme for their removal or separation from us has been yet devised or proposed; and the true inquiry is, What is best to be done with them? In human affairs we are often constrained, by the force of circumstances and the actual state of things, to do what we would not do if that state of things did not exist. The slaves are here, and here must remain, in some condition; and, I repeat, how are they to be best governed? What is best to be done for their happiness and our own? In the slave States the alternative is, that the white man must govern the black, or the black govern the white. In several of those States, the number of the slaves is greater than that of the white population. An immediate abolition of slavery in them, as these ultra abolitionists propose, would be followed by a despe-

rate struggle for immediate ascendancy of the black race over the white race, or rather it would be followed by instantaneous collisions between the two races, which would break out into a civil war that would end in the extermination or subjugation of the one race or the other. In such an alternative, who can hesitate? Is it not better for both parties that the existing state of things should be preserved, instead of exposing them to the horrible strifes and contests which would inevitably attend an immediate abolition? This is our true ground of defence for the continued existence of slavery in our country. It is that which our Revolutionary ancestors assumed. It is that which, in my opinion, forms our justification in the eyes of all Christendom.

A third impediment to immediate abolition is to be found in the immense amount of capital which is invested in slave property. The total number of slaves in the United States, according to the last enumeration of the population, was a little upwards of two millions. Assuming their increase at a ratio, which it probably is, of five per cent. per annum, their present number would be three millions. The average value of slaves at this time is stated by persons well informed to be as high as five hundred dollars each. To be certainly within the mark, let us suppose that it is only four hundred dollars. The total value, then, by that estimate, of the slave property in the United States is twelve hundred millions of dollars. This property is diffused throughout all classes and conditions of soci-

ety. It is owned by widows and orphans, by the aged and infirm, as well as the sound and vigorous. It is the subject of mortgages, deeds of trust, and family settlements. It has been made the basis of numerous debts contracted upon its faith, and is the sole reliance, in many instances, of creditors within and without the slave States, for the payment of the debts due to them. And now it is rashly proposed, by a single fiat of legislation, to annihilate this immense amount of property! — to annihilate it without indemnity and without compensation to its owners! Does any considerate man believe it to be possible to effect such an object without convulsion, revolution, and bloodshed?

I know that there is a visionary dogma which holds that negro slaves cannot be the subject of property. I shall not dwell long with this speculative abstraction. That *is* property which the law declares *to be* property. Two hundred years of legislation have sanctioned and sanctified negro slaves as property. Under all the forms of government which have existed upon this continent during that long space of time, — under the British Government, — under the Colonial Government, — under all the State Constitutions and Governments, — and under the Federal Government itself, — they have been deliberately and solemnly recognised as the legitimate subjects of property. To the wild speculations of theorists and innovators stands opposed the *fact*, that, in an uninterrupted period of two hundred years' duration, under every form of human legislation, and by all the departments of human gov-

ernment, African negro slaves have been held and respected, have descended and been transferred, as lawful and indisputable property. They were treated as property in the very British example which is so triumphantly appealed to as worthy of our imitation. Although the West India planters had no voice in the United Parliament of the British Isles, an irresistible sense of justice extorted from that Legislature the grant of twenty millions of pounds sterling to compensate the colonists for their loss of property.

If, therefore, these ultra abolitionists are seriously determined to pursue their scheme of immediate abolition, they should at once set about raising a fund of twelve hundred millions of dollars to indemnify the owners of slave property. And the taxes to raise that enormous amount can only be justly assessed upon themselves or upon the free States, if they can persuade them to assent to such an assessment; for it would be a mockery of all justice and an outrage against all equity to levy any portion of the tax upon the slave States to pay for their own unquestioned property.

If the considerations to which I have already adverted are not sufficient to dissuade the abolitionists from further perseverance in their designs, the interest of the very cause which they profess to espouse ought to check their career. Instead of advancing, by their efforts, that cause, they have thrown back for half a century the prospect of any species of emancipation of the African race, gradual or immediate, in any of the

States. They have done more; they have increased the rigors of legislation against slaves in most, if not all, of the slave States. Forty years ago the question was agitated in the State of Kentucky of a gradual emancipation of the slaves within its limits. By gradual emancipation I mean that slow but safe and cautious liberation of slaves which was first adopted in Pennsylvania at the instance of Dr. Franklin, in the year 1780, and according to which the generation in being were to remain in slavery, but all their offspring born after a specified day were to be free at the age of twenty-eight, and in the mean time, were to receive preparatory instruction to qualify them for the enjoyment of freedom. That was the species of emancipation which, at the epoch to which I allude, was discussed in Kentucky. No one was rash enough to propose or think of immediate abolition. No one was rash enough to think of throwing loose upon the community, ignorant and unprepared, the untutored slaves of the State. Many thought, and I amongst them, that, as each of the slave States had a right exclusively to judge for itself in respect to the institution of domestic slavery, the proportion of slaves, compared with the white population in that State, at that time, was so inconsiderable that a system of gradual emancipation might have been safely adopted without any hazard to the security and interests of the Commonwealth. And I still think that the question of such emancipation in the farming States is one whose solution depends upon the relative numbers of the two

races in any given State. If I had been a citizen of the State of Pennsylvania when Franklin's plan was adopted, I should have voted for it, because by no possibility could the black race ever acquire the ascendancy in that State. But if I had been then, or were now, a citizen of any of the planting States — the Southern or Southwestern States — I should have opposed, and would continue to oppose, any scheme whatever of emancipation, gradual or immediate, because of the danger of an ultimate ascendancy of the black race, or of a civil contest which might terminate in the extinction of one race or the other.

The proposition in Kentucky for a gradual emancipation did not prevail, but it was sustained by a large and respectable minority. That minority had increased, and was increasing, until the abolitionists commenced their operations. The effect has been to dissipate all prospects whatever, for the present, of any scheme of gradual or other emancipation. The people of that State have become shocked and alarmed by these abolition movements, and the number who would now favor a system even of gradual emancipation is probably less than it was in the years 1798-'9. At the session of the Legislature held in 1837-'8, the question of calling a convention was submitted to the consideration of the people by a law passed in conformity with the Constitution of the State. Many motives existed for the passage of the law, and among them that of emancipation had its influence. When

the question was passed upon by the people at their last annual election, only about one fourth of the whole voters of the State supported a call of a convention. The apprehension of the danger of abolition was the leading consideration amongst the people for opposing the call. But for that, but for the agitation of the question of abolition in States whose population had no right, in the opinion of the people of Kentucky, to interfere in the matter, the vote for a convention would have been much larger, if it had not been carried. I felt myself constrained to take immediate, bold, and decided ground against it.

Prior to the agitation of this subject of abolition, there was a progressive melioration in the condition of slaves throughout all the slave States. In some of them, schools of instruction were opened by humane and religious persons. These are all now checked ; and a spirit of insubordination having shown itself in some localities, traceable, it is believed, to abolition movements and exertions, the legislative authority has found it expedient to infuse fresh vigor into the police and laws which regulate the conduct of the slaves.

And now, Mr. President, if it were possible to overcome the insurmountable obstacles which lie in the way of immediate abolition, let us briefly contemplate some of the consequences which would inevitably ensue. One of these has been occasionally alluded to in the progress of these remarks. It is the struggle which would instantaneously arise between the two races in most of the Southern and Southwestern

States. And what a dreadful struggle would it not be! Embittered by all the recollections of the past, by the unconquerable prejudices which would prevail between the two races, and stimulated by all the hopes and fears of the future, it would be a contest in which the extermination of the blacks, or their ascendancy over the whites, would be the sole alternative. Prior to the conclusion, or during the progress, of such a contest, vast numbers, probably, of the black race would migrate into the free States; and what effect would such a migration have upon the laboring classes in those States!

Now the distribution of labor in the United States is geographical; the free laborers occupying one side of the line, and the slave laborers the other; each class pursuing its own avocations almost altogether unmixed with the other. But, on the supposition of immediate abolition, the black class, migrating into the free States, would enter into competition with the white class, diminishing the wages of their labor, and augmenting the hardships of their condition.

This is not all. The abolitionists strenuously oppose all separation of the two races. I confess to you, Sir, that I have seen, with regret, grief, and astonishment, their resolute opposition to the project of colonization. No scheme was ever presented to the acceptance of man, which, whether it be entirely practicable or not, is characterized by more unmixed humanity and benevolence than that of transporting, with their own consent, the free people of color in the

United States to the land of their ancestors. It has the powerful recommendation, that whatever it does is good ; and, if it effects nothing, it inflicts no one evil or mischief upon any portion of our society. There is no necessary hostility between the objects of colonization and abolition. Colonization deals only with the free man of color, and that with his own free, voluntary consent. It has nothing to do with slavery. It disturbs no man's property, seeks to impair no power in the slave States, nor to attribute any to the general Government. All its action and all its ways and means are voluntary, depending upon the blessing of Providence, which hitherto has graciously smiled upon it. And yet, beneficent and harmless as colonization is, no portion of the people of the United States denounces it with so much persevering zeal and such unmixed bitterness as do the abolitionists.

They put themselves in direct opposition to any separation whatever between the two races. They would keep them forever pent up together within the same limits, perpetuating their animosities, and constantly endangering the peace of the community. They proclaim, indeed, that color is nothing ; that the organic and characteristic differences between the two races ought to be entirely overlooked and disregarded. And, elevating themselves to a sublime but impracticable philosophy, they would teach us to eradicate all the repugnances of our nature, and to take to our bosoms and our boards the black man as we do the white, on the same footing of equal social condi-

tion. Do they not perceive, that, in thus confounding all the distinctions which God himself has made, they arraign the wisdom and goodness of Providence itself? It has been His divine pleasure to make the black man black, and the white man white, and to distinguish them by other repulsive constitutional differences. It is not necessary for me to maintain, nor shall I endeavor to prove, that it was any part of His divine intention that the one race should be held in perpetual bondage by the other; but this I will say, that those, whom He has created different, and has declared, by their physical structure and color, ought to be kept asunder, should not be brought together by any process whatever of unnatural amalgamation.

But if the dangers of the civil contest, which I have supposed, could be avoided, separation or amalgamation is the only peaceful alternative, if it were possible to effectuate the project of abolition. The abolitionists oppose all colonization, and it irresistibly follows, whatever they may protest or declare, that they are in favor of amalgamation. And who are to bring about this amalgamation? I have heard of none of these ultra abolitionists furnishing in their own families or persons examples of intermarriage. Who is to begin it? Is it their purpose not only to create a pinching competition between black labor and white labor, but do they intend also to contaminate the industrious and laborious classes of society at the North by a revolting admixture of the black element?

It is frequently asked, What is to become of the

African race among us? Are they forever to remain in bondage? That question was asked more than half a century ago. It has been answered by fifty years of prosperity but little checkered from this cause. It will be repeated fifty or a hundred years hence. The true answer is, that the same Providence, who has hitherto guided and governed us, and averted all serious evils from the existing relation between the two races, will guide and govern our posterity. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." We have hitherto, with that blessing, taken care of ourselves. Posterity will find the means of its own preservation and prosperity. It is only in the most direful event which can befall this people, that this great interest, and all other of our greatest interests, would be put in jeopardy. Although in particular districts the black population is gaining upon the white, it only constitutes one fifth of the whole population of the United States. And, taking the aggregates of the two races, the European is constantly, though slowly, gaining upon the African portion. This fact is demonstrated by the periodical returns of our population. Let us cease, then, to indulge in gloomy forebodings about the impenetrable future. But, if we may attempt to lift the veil, and contemplate what lies beyond it, I, too, have ventured on a speculative theory, with which I will not now trouble you, but which has been published to the world. According to that, in the progress of time, some one hundred and fifty or two hundred years hence, but few vestiges of the black race will remain among our posterity.

Mr. President, at the period of the formation of our Constitution, and afterwards, our patriotic ancestors apprehended danger to the Union from two causes. One was, the Alleghany Mountains, dividing the waters which flow into the Atlantic Ocean from those which found their outlet in the Gulf of Mexico. They seemed to present a natural separation. That danger has vanished before the noble achievements of the spirit of internal improvement, and the immortal genius of Fulton. And now, nowhere is found a more loyal attachment to the Union than among those very Western people who, it was apprehended, would be the first to burst its ties.

The other cause, domestic slavery, happily the sole remaining cause which is likely to disturb our harmony, continues to exist. It was this which created the greatest obstacle and the most anxious solicitude in the deliberations of the Convention that adopted the general Constitution. And it is this subject that has ever been regarded with the deepest anxiety by all who are sincerely desirous of the permanency of our Union. The Father of his Country, in his last affecting and solemn appeal to his fellow-citizens, deprecated, as a most calamitous event, the geographical divisions which it might produce. The Convention wisely left to the several States the power over the institution of slavery, as a power not necessary to the plan of union which it devised, and as one with which the general Government could not be invested

without planting the seeds of certain destruction. There let it remain undisturbed by any unhallowed hand.

Sir, I am not in the habit of speaking lightly of the possibility of dissolving this happy Union. The Senate knows that I have deprecated allusions, on ordinary occasions, to that direful event. The country will testify, that, if there be anything in the history of my public career worthy of recollection, it is the truth and sincerity of my ardent devotion to its lasting preservation. But we should be false in our allegiance to it, if we did not discriminate between the imaginary and the real dangers by which it may be assailed. Abolition should no longer be regarded as an imaginary danger. The abolitionists, let me suppose, succeed in their present aim of uniting the inhabitants of the free States as one man against the inhabitants of the slave States. Union on the one side will beget union on the other. And this process of reciprocal consolidation will be attended with all the violent prejudices, embittered passions, and implacable animosities which ever degraded or deformed human nature. A virtual dissolution of the Union will have taken place, whilst the forms of its existence remain. The most valuable element of union, mutual kindness, the feelings of sympathy, the fraternal bonds, which now happily unite us, will have been extinguished forever. One section will stand in menacing and hostile array against the other. The collision of opinion will be quickly followed by the clash of arms. I will not attempt to describe scenes which now happily lie concealed from

our view. Abolitionists themselves would shrink back in dismay and horror at the contemplation of desolated fields, conflagrated cities, murdered inhabitants, and the overthrow of the fairest fabric of human government that ever rose to animate the hopes of civilized man. Nor should these abolitionists flatter themselves, that, if they can succeed in their object of uniting the people of the free States, they will enter the contest with a numerical superiority that must insure victory. All history and experience proves the hazard and uncertainty of war; and we are admonished by Holy Writ "that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." But if they were to conquer, whom would they conquer? A foreign foe? one who had insulted our flag, invaded our shores, and laid our country waste? No, Sir; no, Sir. It would be a conquest without laurels, without glory,—a self, a suicidal conquest,—a conquest of brothers over brothers,—achieved by one over another portion of the descendants of common ancestors, who, nobly pledging their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, had fought and bled, side by side, in many a hard battle on land and ocean, severed our country from the British Crown, and established our national independence.

The inhabitants of the slave States are sometimes accused by their Northern brethren with displaying too much rashness and sensibility to the operations and proceedings of abolitionists. But, before they can be rightly judged, there should be a reversal of condi-

tions. Let me suppose that the people of the slave States were to form societies, subsidize presses, make large pecuniary contributions, send forth numerous missionaries throughout all their own borders, and enter into machinations to burn the beautiful capitals, destroy the productive manufactories, and sink in the ocean the gallant ships of the Northern States. Would these incendiary proceedings be regarded as neighborly, and friendly, and consistent with the fraternal sentiments which should ever be cherished by one portion of the Union towards another? Would they excite no emotion, occasion no manifestations of dissatisfaction, nor lead to any acts of retaliatory violence? But the supposed case falls far short of the actual one, in a most essential circumstance. In no contingency could these capitals, manufactories, and ships rise in rebellion and massacre inhabitants of the Northern States.

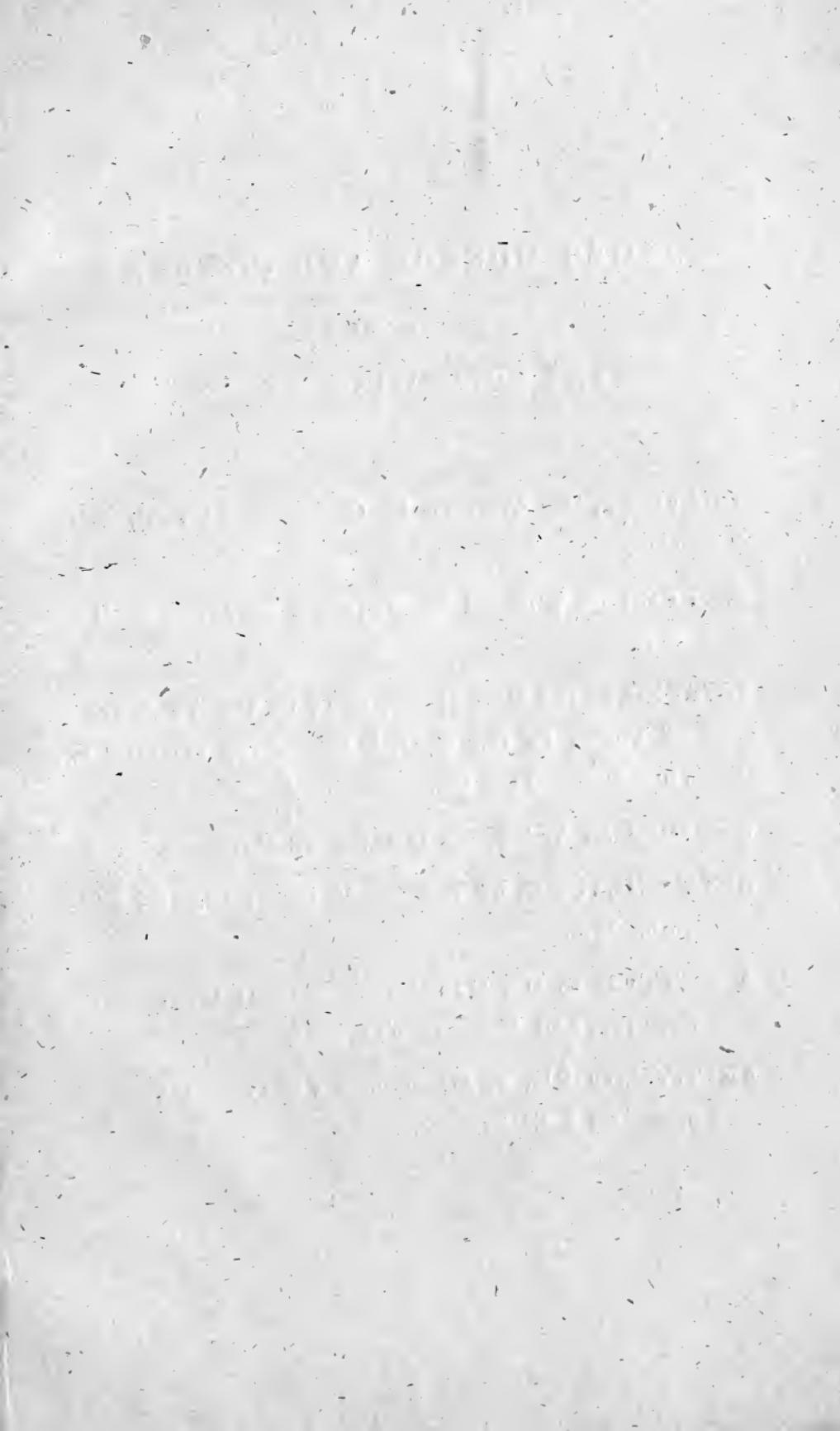
I am, Mr. President, no friend of slavery. The Searcher of all hearts knows that every pulsation of mine beats high and strong in the cause of civil liberty. Wherever it is safe and practicable, I desire to see every portion of the human family in the enjoyment of it. But I prefer the liberty of my own country to that of any other people; and the liberty of my own race to that of any other race. The liberty of the descendants of Africa in the United States is incompatible with the safety and liberty of the European descendants. Their slavery forms an exception — an exception resulting from a stern and inexo-

rable necessity — to the general liberty in the United States. We did not originate, nor are we responsible for, this necessity. Their liberty, if it were possible, could only be established by violating the incontestable powers of the States, and subverting the Union. And beneath the ruins of the Union would be buried, sooner or later, the liberty of both races.

But if one dark spot exists on our political horizon, is it not relieved by the bright and effulgent and cheering light that beams all around us? Was ever a people before so blessed as we are, if true to ourselves? Did ever any other nation contain within its bosom so many elements of prosperity, of greatness, and of glory? Our only real danger lies ahead, conspicuous, elevated, and visible. It was clearly discerned at the commencement, and has been distinctly seen throughout our whole career. Shall we wantonly run upon it, and destroy all the glorious anticipations of the high destiny that awaits us? I beseech the abolitionists themselves solemnly to pause in their mad and fatal course. Amidst the infinite variety of objects of humanity and benevolence which invite the employment of their energies, let them select some one more harmless, that does not threaten to deluge our country in blood. I call upon that small portion of the clergy, which has lent itself to these wild and ruinous schemes, not to forget the holy nature of the Divine mission of the Founder of our religion, and to profit by his peaceful example. I entreat that portion of my countrywomen who have given their

countenance to abolition to remember that they are ever most loved and honored when moving in their own appropriate and delightful sphere; and to reflect that the ink which they shed in subscribing with their fair hands abolition petitions may prove but the prelude to the shedding of the blood of their brethren. I adjure all the inhabitants of the free States to rebuke and discountenance, by their opinion and their example, measures which must inevitably lead to the most calamitous consequences. And let us all, as countrymen, as friends, and as brothers, cherish in unfading memory the motto which bore our ancestors triumphantly through all the trials of the Revolution, for, if adhered to, it will conduct their posterity through all that may, in the dispensations of Providence, be reserved for them.





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